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SUBJECT: AS ELECTION DAY APPROACHES, THE COALITION PULLS
OUT THE STOPS TO PREVENT A RADICOVA WIN

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11. (U) President Gasparovic, speaking before a recent gathering of Smer officials, stated that although he was not a member of any political party, it was as "if I were a member of Smer." He went on to warn that his defeat would be a catastrophe for Smer and the ruling coalition. Indeed, Gasparovic's coalition partners (excluding Meciar's HZDS) have been campaigning as if that were indeed the case. With most Slovak analysts predicting a Gasparovic victory -- albeit not in a landslide -- in the run-off on April 4, what are Smer and SNS so worried about?

12. (SBU) In the case of Smer, and the Prime Minister, it's a well-founded fear that a "co-habitation" government could damage Smer's 2010 electoral prospects. With President Gasparovic at the helm, Fico can expect continued support for his government's agenda. Although Gasparovic has staked out different positions on a few issues, mainly in the security and foreign policy realm, he has not -- in our memory -- been openly critical of any of the Prime Minister's domestic policy priorities or decisions. Although Fico famously stated in 2002 that "Mr. Gasparovic can't wake up tomorrow after 10 years by Meciar's side and say 'I am a leftist,'" it's clear that Gasparovic's supine acceptance of Fico's leadership trumps any concerns about his lack of ideological consistency.

13. (SBU) Radicova, on the other hand, is a product of the Dzurinda Government. She represents the liberal, free market reformers who are a persistent thorn in Fico's side. Not only would she be inclined in her "State of the Republic" addresses to suggest shortcomings in Fico's approach to economic and social issues, she would be likely to shine a bright light on all that Gasparovic has overlooked -- from government corruption and malfeasance to efforts to undermine press freedom and civil society. And, she would have the bully pulpit of the presidency from which to express her concerns.

14. (SBU) Despite their persistent and heavy-handed deployment of the "Hungarian Card," Gasparovic's supporters in the Slovak National Party are motivated -- their rhetoric notwithstanding -- by something more compelling than fear of Hungarian-language textbooks and street signs. If Slota gives credence to the rumors that we routinely hear, i.e., that PM Fico would prefer to govern without SNS after the 2010 elections, his goal will be to ensure that SNS (read: Slota) maintains its unfettered access to the public trough for as long as possible. Thus, Radicova's willingness to talk seriously about issues such as government corruption must be unnerving. (Note: During a press conference on March 28, Slota asserted that the U.S. Embassy was among Radicova's financial backers, and urged voters to consider whom they

would be serving if Radicova prevailed.)

15. (U) Although voter turnout is expected to be somewhat higher in the second round run-off than in the first round, it's clear that most Slovaks do not attach great significance to the presidential elections. It's also clear that relatively few Slovaks see what's at stake with the clarity of PM Fico and Jan Slota. If they did, the outcome on April 4 might be different than that which the pundits predict.
EDDINS